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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002425

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PREF SY IR KU IZ

SUBJECT: CODEL LEVIN DISCUSSES IRAQ'S PLACE IN THE REGION
WITH FM ZEBARI

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Robert Ford for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a September 4 meeting with visiting Senator Levin, FM Zebari requested USG support for establishing a UN tribunal, similar to the one set up following Rafik Hariri's assassination in Lebanon, to determine who was behind the August 19 attacks. Zebari called the attack "Iraq's 9/11." He criticized the "foreign intervention" in Iraq's internal affairs, specifically citing Iran, Syria and Turkey for meddling in Iraq's domestic politics in advance of the national elections scheduled for January. Zebari was optimistic that Iraq and Kuwait could work out their differences, and expressed his appreciation for Kuwait's offer to assist with some of those wounded in the August 19 bombings. Zebari stressed the importance of enhanced USG attention on Iraq in the coming months leading up to the national elections, calling it a "make or break" period. He predicted that PM Maliki would form a new Shi'a-based coalition, similar to his successful Rule of Law list from January's provincial elections, to counter the ISCI/Sadrist-dominated Iraqi National Alliance. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Senators Carl Levin, Jack Reed and Edward Kaufman (CODEL Levin) met September 4 with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari. CODEL Levin was accompanied by Ambassador Hill, Senate Armed Services Committee staff, and Poloff notetaker.

Investigating the August 19 bombings

¶3. (C) FM Zebari told CODEL Levin September 4 that the Government of Iraq (GOI) had recently sent a letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon requesting the UN's assistance in setting up a tribunal to investigate the August 19 attacks against the MFA and Ministry of Finance. He requested USG support for a UN-led international fact-finding mission to review the evidence. Zebari stressed the impact of these bombings on the national psyche, noting that the attackers struck at the heart of the government. August 19 was, in his view, the "Iraqi 9/11." He claimed to have substantial evidence that Iraqis living in Syria were behind the violence and requested USG support for the establishment of a "Hariri-like" board to look into the attacks. FM Zebari emphasized that the Government of Syria was not to blame for the bombings, but criticized President Assad for failing to cooperate with GOI efforts to bring the terrorists to justice. According to Zebari, the only way to "rattle" the Syrians was to publicly shame them with an investigation, similar to the one established following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005.

Some neighbors are "misbehaving"

¶4. (C) While FM Zebari welcomed constructive assistance from Iraq's neighbors to help rebuild the country, he claimed that

other nations in the region, in addition to Syria, including Iran, Turkey and others, have instead increased their "meddling" in Iraq's domestic politics as it approaches a "critical, historic election in January." He predicted a "regional competition" for influence within Iraq, as foreign nations press their own agendas within its borders. Zebari specifically requested a boost in USG focus and attention on Iraq as it prepares for its upcoming national election. The next few months, he asserted, will "make or break Iraq."

¶5. (C) Responding to Senator Levin's question, Zebari maintained that the GOI has directly confronted the leaders of certain countries he claimed were intervening in Iraq, specifically naming President Mubarak of Egypt, President Ahmadinejad of Iran, and President Assad of Syria. Each categorically denied such involvement. When presented in late August with evidence of terrorist training camps within Syria by the Turkish foreign minister, Syrian officials dismissed the evidence and made empty commitments to establish a joint Syria-Turkey-Iraq delegation to investigate, said Zebari.

¶6. (C) Senator Levin queried why the GOI has given the Iranian president a warm reception on the latter's visits to Iraq. Zebari responded by noting the large base of support Iran enjoys among Iraqis. He also acknowledged that Ahmadinejad was the first Muslim leader to visit Iraq and that he did so in 2007, when sectarian tensions were at their peak.

¶7. (C) Zebari expressed optimism that Iraq's issues with Kuwait will be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties.

* Missing Section 002 *
